

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF UN PEACEKEEPERS – 22 MAY 2014

REASSESSING THE UK'S POTENTIAL ROLE IN UN PEACEKEEPING

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I would like to read you the very first paragraph of the UK Government's Strategic Defence and Security Review. I quote:

*“Our country has always had global responsibilities and global ambitions. We have a proud history of standing up for the values we believe in and we should have no less ambition for our country in the decades to come. **Bu we need to be more thoughtful, more strategic and more coordinated in the way we advance our interests and protect our national security.**”¹ End quote*

For me, one of the very first implications of this statement is as follows:

Deep/deeper UK engagement with the United Nations security structure – from diplomats and planners there in New York, to our commitment of personnel into ‘the field’ and NOT just ‘boots on the ground’ but an appropriate mix of sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines and civilians.

I'd look at the resources we put into the European Union, and other international security arrangements and, of course, NATO – a ‘Strategic Hub’² most certainly. But we need to ensure we genuinely feel we have the balance right in terms of people committed to the UN. It's not enough for the UK to be simply one of the top 5 financial contributors to UN peacekeeping.

Two months after that Defence and Security Review was written in 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia. The term ‘Arab Spring’ became commonplace. And Libya then tested the UK's so-called ‘*more thoughtful, more strategic and more coordinated*’ approach. And that included how we communicated with that hard-to-define entity, *the International Community*. It also tested NATO's ability to work with the UN.

In that same year, I was based in the British Embassy, Washington DC, the only building in the world that provides space for every single element of UK Government. That capital city also provides a home for the very best and, hopefully, vocal representatives of the world's nations. (I hope the same is true for London.) I gained further insights thanks to my role on the UN Military Staff Committee in New York. All these were places to learn about: ‘soft’ power, communication (whether it was ‘powerful’ or not), and the far-reaching implications of that UN statement “*take all necessary measures*”.

¹ *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review* October 2010, HMSO: <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/>

² As put forward by Professor Julian Lindley-French.

Now, I could hold up my British passport but, like so many of us in this room, it does not declare the full story... I may have joined the Royal Air Force in 1978 and then served for 34 years but, in 1982, when Argentina decided the *Malvinas* were worth fighting and dying for, and the British thought that *Falklands* sovereignty would not be lost by force, I was acutely aware that, “*oiga, yo naci en Buenos Aires Argentina de padres ingleses pero una parte de mi ser sera siempre Argentino*”. I was born in Buenos Aires and whilst British a bit of me will forever be Argentine...

As a result the lens through which I see the world is *international*; I feel I understand why Kofi Annan has written the words ‘*We the peoples*’ on the front of his latest book. And I also see British interests as *inextricably* linked to the interests of other nations. International relations are not sporting events however much we talk about ‘victory’ and ‘fighting seasons’ and even ‘end-of-term’ as if, soon, we can all go on holiday because ‘*it’s the summer and the world will kindly let us lie on a beach for a few weeks without making any decisions*’. The truth is that *the pulse of the world never stops beating*. And whilst *individuals* may well snatch a few moments of rest, ‘the system’ must stand guard and be prepared to act.

And so this is my chance to lay out some ideas and promote debate, in a forum like this or one-on-one, quietly somewhere without the glare of publicity:

- The National Security system in the UK has evolved significantly in the last 15 years. From the way we debate and make decisions, to the governance of the entire *security architecture* – a term I use because it is NOT just about *the armed forces*. What has also evolved markedly is the cerebral, technical and tactical expertise of sailors, soldiers, airmen and marines, and civilians and even contractors, all of whom put themselves into harm’s way.
- There are other countries which have developed as much or even more, especially since 9/11.
- Hence my finger, politely, wishes to point at those nations, with their advanced capabilities, which have NOT had the capacity in recent years to contribute to blue-beret operations. Because I think they can help ensure the term ‘robust peacekeeping’ means justice for the victims of violence and not simply more violence.
- A generation of British national security people, in uniform and in civilian attire, have gained phenomenal expertise in their approach towards those who would use violence and intimidation. But they have not had the chance to understand the mechanics of the UN system. Time to evolve.

- A British military career in recent years has not been built on the requirement for UN campaign experience. Time to evolve.

- So let me throw out some examples of how I would hope the British military could help: investigative/forensic **policing, logistics, military lawyers, combat medicine, combat stress**, and the more emotive but vital requirement for '**Understanding**' – not secretive *Intelligence* work but intelligent analysis of the situation into which we are putting peacekeepers. Then there's **Training & Education** – it is fundamental that we continue to ensure Britain's Royal College of Defence Studies and the Defence Academy (at Shrivenham) continue to teach the most senior leaders and staffs to 'think UN'. Equally important, we should be sending our people and academics on UN-specific courses that exist (or should exist) elsewhere in the world. There are also lessons to be learned from our Cadet organizations, how we develop but not militarise young people.

- And then there's a significant game-changer I unashamedly champion: **Air Power**, and yet never without an appreciation of what other skills must be and are brought to the party. But, specifically, Air Power is under-represented in UN operations, despite the deployment in recent days of Dutch Apache helicopters, hence I hope you'll forgive me for spelling out a little more about Air Power's **4 Roles**:
 - (Firstly) everything to do with the **Control of the Air and Space** - eg airspace management, flight safety, rapid decision-making, or even the complex task of setting up and enforcing a no-fly zone.

 - (Secondly), **Air Mobility** - aircraft that can move people and goods from A to B or even air-drop emergency supplies to places cut off by the violence of the weather, natural disaster and mankind.

 - (Thirdly) **Intelligence and Situational Awareness** - the RAF has sent an aircraft to contribute to the international search for Nigerian girls taken by Boko Haram. I'm aware of the difficulties with that word 'Intelligence'. That should not stop us using aircraft including remotely-piloted systems to help us get a better picture of what is happening. That will protect our people and those on the ground.

 - (Finally), **Attack** – yes, some Air attack platforms have been involved with the UN already but we have yet to exploit, to the full, rotary, fixed-wing and remotely-piloted variants, in both their use of force but also in their deterrent effect. And, above all, with Air Commanders who have, over the last few years, gained a genuinely nuanced understanding of the use of '**Combat Air**' alongside all those other vital Roles.

I am not championing the wholesale use of 'aggressive' military power, including Air Power.

I am after the proper use of educated, experienced military personnel who absolutely get what it means to be '*more thoughtful, more strategic and more coordinated*' from all the things they've been doing in recent years whether under national, NATO or EU auspices.

And that means personnel who understand confrontation and conflict and what can be done from the Sea, from under the Sea, from Land, Air, Space and Cyberspace, and what can't be done.

And who appreciate the need to retain their legitimacy by constantly proving they understand the UN mandate.

I know it's difficult to get that mandate in the first place hence all the more reason to challenge all nations to send their best people for UN operations. That will most certainly benefit 'the peoples' who cry out for a better response from 'the International Community'. Thank you.

1428 words – speak no slower than 119 words per minute for 12 minutes!